DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 333 721 FL 019 208

AUTHOR Allexsaht-Snider, Martha
TITLE Parent-Teacher Interaction in a Bilingual Context: Teachers' Perspectives.
PUB DATE 6 Apr 91
NOTE 42p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association (Chicago, IL, April 3-7, 1991).
PUB TYPE Reports - Research/Technical (143) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Bilingual Education; Case Studies; Elementary Education; Ethnography; *Limited English Speaking; Parent Participation; *Parent Teacher Cooperation; School Districts; *Teacher Attitudes
IDENTIFIERS *California; Language Minorities

ABSTRACT

An ethnographic case study investigated relations between teachers and parents of minority-language students in two elementary schools in a small California agricultural community. The study examined: (1) school district policies and guidelines concerning teacher interactions with parents and parent involvement in school activities; (2) the range of cultural knowledge that the three teachers studied applied in their work with parents; (3) sources of the teachers' cultural knowledge; (4) patterns in the teachers' experiences and practices of parent involvement; and (5) teacher expectations for parental roles in the learning process--in general, at home, and in the school and classroom. The teachers included a third-grade teacher fluent in Spanish and with extensive experience teaching English as a Second Language in South America, a fourth-grade teacher with rudimentary Spanish skills, and a fifth-grade teacher with fluent Spanish and counseling experience. It is concluded that as these three teachers reflected on their parent involvement practices, they determined that the nature and quality of their prior experiences with parents, not just length of experience, affected their present practices and understanding of interactions with parents. The teachers also cited aspects of the social organization of their schools as significant in their work with families. A 26-item bibliography is included. (MSE)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED333721

Parent-Teacher Interaction in a Bilingual Context: Teachers' Perspectives

Martha Allexsaht-Snider
Graduate School of Education
University of California at Santa Barbara

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association, Chicago, Illinois, April 6,1991

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
Allexsaht-Snider
TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
☑ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

FL019208

Parent-Teacher Interaction in a Bilingual Context: Teachers' Perspectives

Since the early 1960s, policymakers and educators have operated on the premise that improved home-school relations and parental involvement in their children's education are important means to student achievement, particularly minority student achievement (Leler, 1983). Concern about low levels of achievement for minority youth has recently reached a state of alarm, and we are presented almost daily with new sets of statistics about demographic trends in school enrollment for ethnic and linguistic minority youth coupled with test scores and drop-out figures that paint a dismal picture (Trueba, 1989).

It is not surprising that one response to the concerns about minority student achievement has been a renewed interest in home-school linkages and promotion of parent involvement in their children's education. Reviews of the research such as Henderson's "The Evidence Continues to Grow: Parent Involvement Improves Student Achievement" (1987) consistently provide solid evidence of the value of involving parents in their children's education. Work such as that done by Clark (1983,1987), Comer (1980,1984,1988), and Delgado-Gaitan (1990) with minority families, demonstrates the families' readiness for active participation in all levels of their children's schooling. Why then is there an often repeated complaint that parents, particularly minority parents "don't care" about their children's education?

In large-scale surveys conducted over the last several years (Metropolitan Life Survey of the American Teacher, 1987; Epstein and

Becker, 1988; Becker and Epstein, 1988), teachers report that they would like parents to be more involved in their children's schooling. Why then do we mount legislative campaigns (California Initiative for Parent Involvement,1988) and initiate teacher education reform to encourage teachers to involve parents? Why do school districts, schools, and teachers continue to need prodding such as regulations and requirements if the benefits are obvious from both a commonsense and a scientific research perspective? What are the barriers to comprehensive, effective home/school cooperation and interaction? As Chavkin (1989) states, "We have yet to take advantage of minority parents' interest in involving themselves in the education of their children" (p. 120). There is general agreement that communication between teachers and parents, and parent involvement in schooling, are beneficial. But no one seems clear about how to go about facilitating that communication and involvement.

Researchers of home-school relations in multicultural contexts (Bronfenbrenner, 1978; Delgado-Gaitan, 1990; Lareau, 1989) have suggested that we need a broader, more all-encompassing viewpoint than has been taken in earlier studies from which to launch our studies and program recommendations in this area. Lareau (1989) argues that researchers of family-school relations have looked at family life or school life, and suggests that what we need to examine are "inter-institutional linkages". There is a growing body of research on the role that families can play in fostering children's learning in the context of the home and in collaboration with the school. However, researchers are only beginning to explore how teachers establish linkages with families, and what aspects of the social context of

schooling and teaching foster or hinder those linkages. Parent involvement or cannot be facilitated without a clearer understanding of teachers' beliefs and practices regarding communication and interaction with parents and the institutional context that shapes those attitudes and practices. A better understanding of the teacher's role in parent involvement is critical to reaching a goal of stronger home-school linkages to facilitate children's learning. The following paper integrates a summary of published research on teacher-parent relations with a case study that examines parent-teacher interactions in a bilingual setting in an attempt to further our understanding of teachers' roles in parent involvement.

A Review: Research on Teacher-Parent Relations

Writers and researchers since the 1930s have described the deliberate distance established in the relationship between teachers and parents and the conflict inherent in these relationships. Waller (1932), in the classic, *The Sociology of Teaching*, attributed the conflict to the fact that the teacher is concerned with the educational needs of the child as a member of a group, while parents are more concerned with the personal, affective aspects of their child's individual development. Lightfoot (1978) interprets the conflict slightly differently, emphasizing the fact that most teachers are women and the parent who interacts with the school is usually the mother. She suggests that teacher-parent conflicts originate in the competition for the child's affection and loyalty. The conflict ensues when the mother must "surrender" the child to the school. Teachers see themselves as providing a more neutral and supportive

environment for the child where he or she can develop without the constraints of a mother's expectations and needs.

Other researchers, in examining the teacher-parent relationship from the perspective of status, have suggested that teachers use the distance they establish between themselves and parents to maintain and reinforce their higher status in relation to the parents. Warren (1979) investigated this phenomenon in a study comparing a rural German school with a suburban American school. In both settings, teachers united to resist parents' efforts to interfere in their domains of authority and expertise. Warren found that seniority, tenure in the community, and traditional rural culture supported the status differential and social distance that teachers wished to maintain in the German school. In contrast, the American teachers, who were younger newcomers with no tradition of higher status than the parents in the community, had a complex and ambivalent relationship with the parents.

In another, more wide-ranging and complex study, Hoover-Dempsey, Bassler, and Brissie (1987) came to similar conclusions about the influence of what they refer to as "teacher efficacy" on parent-teacher relationships and perceptions. The study examined a variety of factors associated with parent involvement practices: (1) school socio-economic status; (2) teacher characteristics such as level of education and efficacy; (3) grade level; (4) school formalization and centralization; (5) principal's support and colleagues parent involvement practices. Hoover-Dempsey, et al. investigated levels of teacher-reported involvement and variations in the above-mentioned qualities of school settings. Their most significant finding was that

higher levels of teacher efficacy were associated with higher levels of parent involvement. Teacher efficacy was defined as: "Teachers' beliefs that they can teach, that their students can learn, and that they can access a body of professional knowledge" (p. 429). Hoover-Dempsey, et al. hypothesized that efficacious teachers, sure of their teaching abilities, welcomed parent input as a complement to their teaching program and therefore parents felt that their participation was productive. In conclusion, the researchers call for behaviorally-based data to support their analyses of teacher reports.

Generalizing from sociological studies of bureaucratic organizations, Corwin and Wagenaar (1976) hypothesized that organizational structures such as formalization and centralization increase social distance between employees (teachers) and their clientele. Their study examined aspects of the institutional culture that might inhibit or enhance parent-teacher interaction. Corwin and Wagenaar found little correlation between the features of organizational structures that they investigated and teacher-parent interaction. The researchers did, however, encounter a finding that contradicted one of their original assumptions. They had predicted that teachers with more seniority would be more alienated from parents, due to the status and seniority associated with length of experience. Instead, they found that more experienced teachers interacted more frequently with parents. Hoover-Dempsey, et al's (1987) finding parallels that of Corwin and Wagenaar (i.e., that more efficacious teachers had more communication with parents), and points to a need to focus further study explicitly on newer teachers and their relationships with parents.

Findings from a recent study examining barriers to junior high parents' and teachers' communication conducted by Leitch and Tangri (1988) were somewhat vague and inconclusive. However, their study did raise an interesting contradiction between teachers' and parents' perceptions of involvement and the actual activities that were documented. The parents and teachers cited lack of time on the parents' part as a significant problem, yet data on actual involvement showed that employed parents might be more involved than nonemployed parents. Their study demonstrates the importance of triangulating reported data with observational data in order to obtain a clearer picture of the many dimensions of parent-teacher relationships.

In summary, researchers have identified many factors that may impact on these parent-teacher relationships from the teacher's point of view, and no one influence stands out clearly from the others. Problems in parent-teacher relationships may be due to to efforts on the part of teachers to maintain their status or authority. Conflict may ensue because of competition for children's loyalty and affection or perceptions of children's needs that differ between parents and teachers. Aspects of organizational structure may affect teachers' relationship with parents. It may be that years of experience and a sense of efficacy are the most significant factors affecting teachers' involvement with parents. Lastly, misperceptions on the part of parents and teachers may be guiding their relationships. In Epstein's (1987) survey, teachers who believed minority and lower socioeconomic level families could not assist their children's learning, reported less parental involvement than teachers who believed that all

parents could assist their children's learning. Minority parents (Delgado-Gaitan, 1990; Leitch and Tangri, 1988) report a feeling of inadequacy in relating to teachers and the school environment due to their own lack of schooling.

Little research regarding teachers' practices and understandings of parent involvement has been conducted and it has been limited to survey research. Epstein (1987) and Epstein and Becker (1982) have conducted survey research to determine teachers' thinking about parent-involvement strategies and how they practice them, but they themselves assert that there is a lack of research that systematically relates teachers' efforts to involve parents with their effects on students and their families. Additionally, there is little or no research demonstrating the effect of families and their involvement with school on teachers and their teaching. Epstein and Becker's research show that teachers perceive that there are few rewards, other than internal ones, to encourage a teacher to spend time working towards the potential benefits of parent involvement.

The studies summarized above have provided us with some insights and information about teachers interacting with parents, but clearly there is a need for more research in this vein that could contribute to an understanding of the complex linkages between schools and families. Teachers and educators are seeking ways and means for working with families, and in particular are unsure about how to reach linguistic and ethnic minority families. The linguistic and cultural barriers to teacher-parent communication in bilingual and multicultural settings are myriad, and it is in these settings that both parents and teachers express the most frustration and lack of success

(Delgado-Gaitan, 1990; Epstein and Becker, 1982; Romo, 1984). The following case study of parent-teacher interactions in a bilingual context was undertaken in an effort to provide a view of the in-institutional linkages between family life and school life and the processes that parents and teachers and parents undergo in participating in the schools in a bilingual setting. The study begins with an examination of teachers' cultural knowledge for working with parents and teachers' expectations for parental roles in the learning process.

A Case Study: From the Teachers' Points of View

During the past two years, I have conducted research in conjunction with a long-term ethnographic study of parental empowerment and involvement and family literacy undertaken by Delgado-Gaitan in Huerta, California. Interviews with parents, teachers and administrators and participant observation in a variety of settings for parent-teacher and parent-child interaction in this in-depth study have yielded valuable insights about the parent empowerment process and immigrant parents' role in their children's education. A pre-school teacher, district bilingual administrator, migrant education facilitator, a few teachers, and the researcher (Delgado-Gaitan, 1990) have played supportive roles in the process of empowerment for the Spanish-speaking parents in the school district, but in general, teacher participation has been sporadic and peripheral. As parents gained knowledge of the school culture and an understanding of their critical role in their children's education through the process of cooperatively building a Spanish-speaking parent support group, they began to seek more direct links and

communication with teachers. District administrators, teachers, and parents have all sought to better understand how more regular and effective home-school collaboration could be facilitated in individual classrooms and the school as a whole. In the following pages, an analysis of teachers' perspectives on parent involvement in a bilingual setting will be presented. The analysis is part of a larger, year-long study that also explored parents' perspectives and the construction of parent-teacher relations over time in three bilingual classrooms.

Anderson-Levitt (1990) discusses the fact that "Teachers bring knowledge, know-how, and values to the classroom and draw on them to construct, jointly with their students, a local culture of the classroom." Just as teachers and students construct a local classroom culture, teachers and parents together construct a local culture of parent involvement. The cultural knowledge for parent involvement that teachers bring is framed by the local school culture and the district culture. In this context, teachers' cultural knowledge refers to the common beliefs that teachers hold about what is possible, about ways of interpreting and evaluating what is occurring, and how actions, interactions, and artifacts that comprise life in the context of parent-teacher involvement will be perceived. In addition to the school and district contexts, teachers' work with parents is embedded in a professional teacher culture, constructed during training and day to day interchange with other teachers at school. In the bilingual setting of this study, teachers' prior crosscultural experiences contributed directly to their work with families. Teachers are also influenced in their practices of parent involvement by interactions with the

parent/community culture in which they work. Figure 1 illustrates the dynamic nature of the construction of parent-teacher relations.

Insert Figure 1 About Here

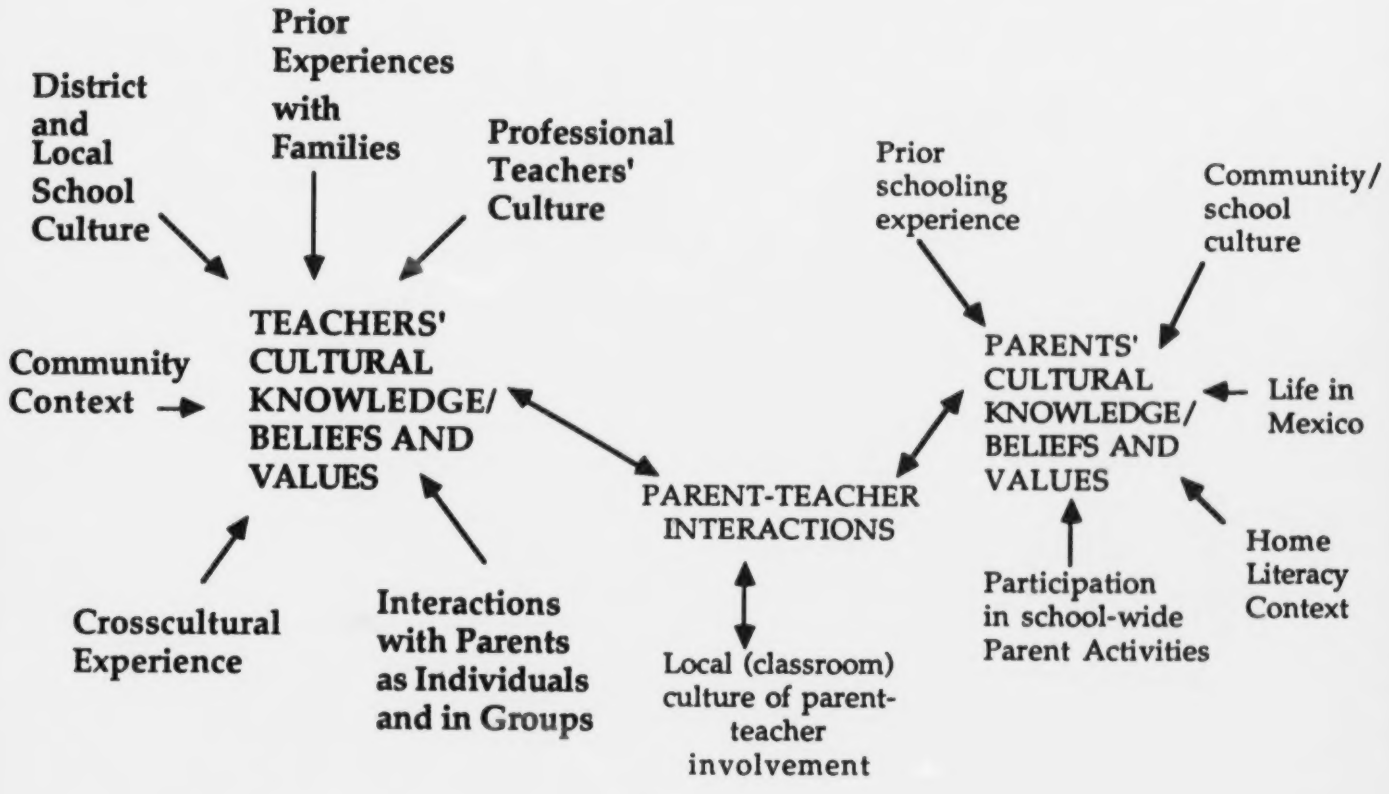
In the following case study, a description of the district and school contexts for parent involvement in the community of Huerta, California will set the stage for the discussion of teachers' perspectives on parent involvement. This presentation of the broader context for parent-teacher relations will be followed with an outline of teachers' cultural knowledge for communication and interaction with parents in a bilingual setting. Teachers' cultural knowledge emerges from training and interactions with colleagues and their prior experiences with parents and with bilingual communities. Teachers' expectations for parents and their view of parents' roles in children's learning is also explored.

The District and School Contexts

The study was conducted with teachers, students, and parents in two elementary schools in a small school district along the south central coast of California which I will call Huerta. Huerta has historically had an agriculturally based economy, with citrus and avocado ranches as well as flower growing and nursery businesses. It increasingly has also served as a home for professionals in all walks of life who commute to nearby larger cities. In addition it has provided a variety of employment opportunities in the service sector. According to the city manager's budget figures, in August, 1989, Huerta's population was about 13,000. Whites comprised about 67% of the

FIGURE 1

The Construction of Parent Teacher Relations in a Bilingual Setting


Prior Experiences with Families
District and Local School Culture
Professional Teachers' Culture
Prior schooling experience
Community/ school culture
TEACHERS' CULTURAL KNOWLEDGE/ BELIEFS AND VALUES
Community Context
PARENTS' CULTURAL KNOWLEDGE/ BELIEFS AND VALUES
Life in Mexico
PARENT-TEACHER INTERACTIONS
Home Literacy Context
Participation in school-wide Parent Activities
Crosscultural Experience
Interactions with Parents as Individuals and in Groups
Local (classroom) culture of parent-teacher involvement

population, Mexican Americans 31%, Asian Americans 1%, and African American and other including American Indian each comprised .5% (Delgado-Gaitan, 1990).

The school district served a population that was about 35% Hispanic, 40% of whom were limited English-proficient (Delgado-Gaitan, 1990). The more than 2,000 students in the district were housed in six schools, four elementary, one junior high and one high school. Lincoln and Primavera Schools, where the study was conducted, had 3rd-6th grade classes on their campuses. Both schools had bilingual programs, with bilingual teachers in two third grades, a fourth, and a fifth grade at Lincoln School and one bilingual teacher at each grade at Primavera School. There were seven other English-speaking teachers at Lincoln School, as well as the four bilingual teachers. At Primavera, there were several Gifted and Talented Classes and a self-contained special education class, in addition to eight classes taught by English-speaking teachers.

District Expectations for Parent-Teacher Involvement. The mission statement (Appendix I, Board Policy, April 4, 1989) for the Huerta School District asserted that the district was "in partnership" with the community and parents. Board policy, in a section entitled "Participation in Community Life" (p. 1311, Board Policy, April 4, 1989) stated that all staff were encouraged to live in the community and that district administrators were "highly encouraged" to do the same. In fact, most administrators did live in the community, but many teachers did not. The teachers in the study were not aware of this provision in board policy. Participation in community affairs was encouraged in another area of the section on "Participation in

Community Life", although with the caveat that it should not interfere with regular work.

Two references were made in the Board Policy to parents. In the first instance, parent-teacher organizations with primary goals for the "educational growth and welfare of public school children" were recognized. The parent-teacher groups were encouraged to participate in school activities. In the second instance, parents and other members of the community were encouraged to visit the schools. No references to the schools' responsibilities towards parents or the parents' responsibilities to schools were found.

In general throughout the district, administrators took active part in parent organization meetings. School site administrators regularly attended English-speaking parent meetings, and three of the five principals attended Spanish-speaking parent meetings on a regular basis. The two principals who did not regularly attend Spanish-speaking parent meetings, did attend them periodically. In addition to school site administrators, the school superintendent and board members occasionally attended parent meetings, including Spanish-speaking parent meetings. The director of special programs and bilingual education had consistently attended the Spanish-speaking parents' district coordination monthly meetings for three years.

Teachers' responsibilities to parents were spelled out in some detail in the teachers' contract with the district and in the "Self-Evaluation Form for Certificated Personnel" (January, 1989). The contract stated that "Teachers are expected to participate in parent-teacher organizations and activities" (p. 4). Teachers were aware of

this expectation on the part of the district in general and on the part of their site administrators, but they commented that "You're supposed to but people don't", and "... the teachers don't even show up for the meetings and I know from the parents that this was a big bone of contention". One teacher added that when the meetings were held at lunch time or right after school, teachers did attend.

In general, it was the whole-school night parent meetings that the teachers chose not to participate in. A fourth grade teacher suggested that it was because the teachers did not live in the district and it was too far to drive back at night. In several cases during the study, however, teachers did attend night meetings with the parents. They attended meetings that had been planned as parent education workshops for the parents in their own classrooms, or meetings in which specific teachers were invited to give presentations about special topics such as the new program in English as a Second Language or a new district-wide program for building students' self esteem. In addition to being expected to attend general parent meetings, teachers were expected to attend evening social events at the school such as potluck barbecues and children's performances.

Teachers' responsibilities for keeping students and parents informed about student work and behavior were spelled out in the earlier mentioned district "Self-Evaluation Form". Teachers were expected to report student achievement and behavior to parents and students on an ongoing basis, and to summarize the information at District-designated reporting periods. Outstanding student achievements and improved behavior were also to be reported to parents. The final requirement for teacher-parent communication was

in regard to parent and student conferences. Teachers were asked to schedule conferences and participate in them actively.

The teachers in the study enumerated many of the above areas in explaining their understanding of the district expectations for teachers in working with parents, and added several other expectations specific to their school sites. In one school, the teacher noted that her principal expected each of the teachers to send home a monthly newsletter to parents, and that she asked for copies to make sure that teachers were doing it. The principal also asked teachers to send home a warning note about behavioral or homework problems before children received a detention for these problems, so that parents were aware of the problems before punishment was assigned.

Teachers in both of the schools in the study understood that their principals wanted them to let them know about any serious problems with a student before contacting the parents. In several cases, the principals of the two teachers either contacted the parents themselves about a problem with a student such as aggressive behavior with other children, or joined the teacher in meeting with the parents. Teachers also discussed the fact that they were obligated by law to go immediately to the principal if there was any suspicion of child abuse.

For the most part, there were few explicit district guidelines for parent-teacher interactions. The frequency and type of interaction and communication with parents were left up to the individual teachers to determine, with some guidance from principals. References to parent involvement in formal district documents were restricted to the mention of parent-teacher organizations and the

invitation for parents to visit the schools. As a result of the lack of specific guidelines, individual teachers and the parents in their classrooms were free to negotiate their own framework and culture of interaction, which was dependent upon their cultural knowledge for parent-teacher involvement. The following section will demonstrate the range of cultural knowledge teachers applied to their work with parents.

Teachers' Cultural Knowledge for Working with Families

While all of the three teachers in the study were situated within the same district culture for parent involvement and two similar school cultures, their individual differences in cultural knowledge for working with families influenced their expectations for parents and their practices of parent involvement. The three teachers had markedly different backgrounds and experiences that produced different types of cultural knowledge that formed the framework that guided their communications with parents.

Introduction to the Three Teachers. The first teacher, Linda Weston, was in her second year of teaching third grade at Primavera School. She was fluent in Spanish and had extensive prior experience teaching English as a Second Language to adults in South America. These were factors her principal, David Prado, considered to be assets when he suggested that she might participate in a parent involvement research project. Linda, however, did not mention her language skill and prior experiences teaching Spanish-speaking adults as important in her interactions with parents in her classroom. What was salient for her was her own lack of experience with children in and out of school. She found that without that experience, she was not sure of

herself in talking with parents about their children. In fact, she felt that they knew more about working with children and children's behavior than she did.

When asked to talk about working with parents in the past year, Linda noted that she had little experience with children or parent involvement programs and had had no prior training in working with parents. The few encounters with parents she related indicated that she used the infrequent spontaneous interactions with parents to expand her own cultural knowledge and understanding of her students' behavior.

Kathy Risotto, who taught fourth grade at Lincoln School, was also in her second year of teaching. She had rudimentary Spanish skills, and had taught previously for several years in a parent-run preschool. In contrast to Linda, she expressed confidence about working with parents, and attributed her confidence to earlier positive experiences she had had in communicating with parents in the preschool. She felt, however, a lack of knowledge about teaching adults in groups, which became evident to her when she conducted a parent education program to suggest ways of reading at home with the children. She reflected on the lack of training for teaching adults in her teacher education program. She found it very different to teach the parents about the elements of a story (i.e., plot, characters, setting) than to present the same material to her students.

Kathy also felt that even though she was comfortable in working with parents in general, her lack of skill with Spanish limited her access to knowledge of particular families and their community, and thus, limited her effectiveness with Spanish-speaking parents and

children. She expressed frustration when talking with parents about the fact that she needed to rely on a colleague or the children to translate. She could understand what the parents were saying in general, but missed the details and was unable to respond to them articulately in the ways that she wanted to. Kathy regularly talked about the need to learn more Spanish.

The more experienced teacher in the study, Alyssa Bond, had taught fifth grade for five years at Primavera School, had prior experience as a family counselor, and had developed fluent Spanish skills from studying and living in Mexico. She found her past experiences in counseling parents and translating for parents and teachers when she worked as an aide in the schools, had prepared her to work with parents in her own classroom. Alyssa listed many influences on her work with parents, ranging from a supervising teacher who had provided a very caring and involved model during her student teaching practicum, to the many friendships with Spanish-speaking families she had developed over the years.

Common Sources of Cultural Knowledge and Differences Amongst the Three Teachers. The brief introduction to the three teachers in the study indicates the range of factors that they suggested had influenced their attitudes and practices of parent involvement in the bilingual settings where they taught. Table 1 provides a summary of the sources teachers identified for their cultural knowledge for working with parents. A more detailed overview of the sources of cultural knowledge that influenced all three of the teachers will be presented in the following paragraphs, and other sources of

knowledge for working with parents that were drawn upon differentially by the teachers will also be noted.

Insert Table 1 About Here

As mentioned above, Kathy Risotto highlighted her prior involvement in a preschool run by parents as a prime influence on her current practices of parent involvement. She related,

> "The preschool that I worked for was run by the parents so .... there was a lot of interaction. In fact we did written reports on the kids every day and then talked with them- the parents- and then did lots of parent conferencing. There was a lot of contact with the parents."

Alyssa Bond referred to similar experiences with parents prior to teaching her own elementary class that had influenced the ways in which she worked with families:

> "When I was doing my internship in counseling at UCSB [University of California at Santa Barbara] in their Education Counseling Clinic, ... my cases were mostly parents who came in and they were having trouble with their children. They wouldn't do their homework, they wouldn't get up and brush their teeth in the morning, that kind of thing, and so I started working with parents and children. And then when I was working in the schools as an aide .... I would meet parents just as they would come to conferences .... especially the Spanish-speaking parents because there wasn't anybody else who could speak with them."

A juxtaposition of the third teacher's (Linda Weston) concern with her own lack of prior experience with parents, alongside the other two teachers' chronicles of extensive prior experiences, is very revealing. It makes it clear how important previous opportunities to work directly with parents are in these teachers' minds.

TABLE 1

Sources of Teachers' Cultural Knowledge for Working with Parents in Bilingual Settings

Experiencies Prior to Elementary Teaching:	In an institution that fostered parent-teacher communication (e.g. preschool) With children in school and other settings As a counselor with parents As a translator for parents As an intern with a teacher who modeled parent involvement practices Studying and living in Mexico and South America
Colleagues	Previous year's teacher Other teachers who model effective practices General school climate for parent-teacher relations
Interactions with Parents as Individuals:	In formal structured settings (e.g. parent conferences) In casual circumstances, before and after school During field trips and class parties
Interactions with Parents in Groups:	In organized parent activities In school-wide Spanish-speaking parent groups In parent education programs (e.g. Family Math)
Community Contacts	Spanish-speaking teaching assistants English-speaking teaching assistants Involvement with families over several years through teaching siblings

A second source of knowledge for working with parents mentioned by all three teachers was their use of students' previous year teachers as a source of information about how to approach individual children and their families. Alyssa Bond had a written list of all her students that she had gone over with their fourth grade teacher. The list included details about parents the fourth grade teacher thought had been demanding and critical and a parent who often volunteered and then didn't follow through on her commitment. Similarly, Kathy Risotto had turned to a student's third grade teacher when the student began having problems with other children. In talking with the previous year's teacher, she got the information that the boy's father had been very concerned and willing to work closely with the teacher.

Linda Weston was a third grade teacher in a third through sixth grade school, and therefore didn't have easy access to the students' previous teachers. She noted, "Since we're a third to sixth grade school, I don't really know a lot about what's gone on in preschool through second grade" (fieldnotes, January, 1990). Again, her mention of the lack of access to the knowledge held by students' previous teachers, in contrast to the other teachers' active and regular use of this resource, points to its importance.

Teachers discussed an overall climate for parent involvement and were aware of their colleagues' practices of parent communication. They implied that in their own classrooms, they were conforming with the norms set by their colleagues throughout the school. Kathy Risotto and Alyssa Bond characterized their colleagues

as engaging in frequent communication with parents. Both agreed that "Messages go home a lot."

Two more significant sources of cultural knowledge for working with parents were mentioned by Alyssa Bond and Kathy Risotto and and were absent for Linda Weston: (1) interactions with parents during class field trips; and (2) utilization of instructional assistants who were from the community and knew the parents outside of school. Alyssa Bond had gotten to know many of the Spanish-speaking parents in her class during field trips in the Migrant Education summer school classes she had taught for two years. Kathy Risotto got to know her English- and Spanish-speaking students' extended family members as well as parents during class field trips. She found that the families had such a strong commitment to be involved in class activities, that if the parents were unable to participate because of work responsibilities, aunts and uncles of her students would go along to help on field trips. Linda Weston generally did not have parent participation on field trips and so went alone with her students or with the assistance of her instructional assistant.

Both Kathy and Alyssa relied heavily on their instructional assistants to facilitate communication with parents and to provide them with insights about parents' perspectives. Kathy's instructional assistant was English-speaking and lived in the local neighborhood. She knew many of the families of the children in Kathy's class, and often offered her view of how to approach a particular parent. She sometimes talked to parents outside of school and provided them with a perspective on the teacher's goals and expectations for the class. Kathy's access to knowledge of the the English-speaking families in

her class was clearly facilitated by her instructional assistant, but she did not have a similar resource for working with the Spanish-speaking community. She regularly struggled to find resources such as neighboring teachers' bilingual aides and frequently utilized the bilingual students in her class to mediate communication with Spanish-speaking families and provide information about the community.

Alyssa Bond valued the collaboration of her bilingual instructional assistant highly, explaining as follows:

> "She knows everybody. She lives in [Huerta] and [has known] these kids since they were little, knows all these parents, is related to some of them. .... what I'll do is have her call, and then if I want the parent to come in, then I'll meet them and talk to them."

Linda Weston also worked with a bilingual instructional assistant, but did not refer to her as a resource in communicating with parents. She did, however, discuss two sources for her knowledge of the parents in her classroom and for developing programs for parents that were not mentioned by the other two teachers. Linda had gotten to know many of the Spanish-speaking parents in her class and had developed a sense of the Spanish-speaking community's concerns through her participation in the school-wide monthly parent meetings of the COPLA (Comité de Padres Latinos) parent group. She was also aware of a participatory model for parent education programs called *Family Math* that she used as a guide in planning her own parent education sessions for family involvement in science.

All three teachers had informal, casual encounters with parents in which they learned more about individual families and their

children and also gained insights into parents' perspectives in general. Parents stopped by before and after school to drop off things for their children or to pick them up for the dentist, and parents and teachers both grabbed these moments to get to know each other better and exchange information about the child. Alyssa Bond's casual encounters with parents were frequent and regular. She drew on them for perspective on her students and also took advantage of every opportunity to communicate her expectations for students and parents and to make those expectations meaningful to parents.

Kathy Risotto had less frequent informal encounters and used them more to develop rapport with parents and make them feel comfortable in the school context. She noted that her lack of skill with Spanish limited her ability to gain much information from Spanish-speaking parents in these encounters or for her to inform them about the class curriculum or expectations for students and parents. As mentioned earlier, Linda Weston had very few informal encounters with parents. She utilized the few she did have to gain insights into children's behavior and experiences outside of school that might be relevant in the classroom.

A final source of cultural knowledge about parents was mentioned only by Alyssa Bond, for obvious reasons. She had access to knowledge about families through her previous teaching of older siblings of her present students. Alyssa was the only one of the three teachers who had taught in the district for more than two years, and so was much more likely to find herself teaching younger siblings of former students. In one instance, she talked about the need to contact a parent. Alyssa said she knew the mother would cooperate

and follow up on a request to monitor her son's homework more closely because she had shown that she "cared" in the previous year with her older son.

Patterns in the Teachers' Experiences and Practices of Parent Involvement. As the three teachers' experiences and practices of parent involvement were compared over time, several patterns emerged. Linda Weston, the teacher who felt that she had little prior experience and cultural knowledge to apply in working with parents, also reported the fewest interactions with parents and the least number of activities and mechanisms for parent communication and involvement in her class. She was concerned about the infrequent or nonexistent participation of parents in class activities such as field trips and parties. Because of the lack of parent participation in such class activities, she had fewer opportunities to gather knowledge about parents and their children. The other two teachers had discussed these kind of informal interactions as key times for getting to know parents and exchanging information about their children.

In general, the two teachers who had extensive and varied practices of parent communication and involvement in their classrooms accessed a rich and diverse spectrum of sources for cultural knowledge for working with parents individually and as a group. These sources were informal and based on interactions in the local contexts and experiences of the teachers. None of the three mentioned any formalized training for working with parents either in preservice or inservice teacher education or any written texts they had used as resources in planning their approach to parent communication and involvement. The absence of formal training for

working with parents prompted teachers to make use of knowledge gained in prior work experiences, in consultation with colleagues in the schools, and through actual interactions with parents, that was then applied in their practice of parent involvement and communication with parents.

The fact that teachers' cultural knowledge for working with parents emerged from experiences prior to their teaching in elementary schools and was gathered in informal settings is important to consider in developing policy to encourage teachers to be more involved with parents. It is also salient for planning preservice and inservice programs for teachers about working with parents. The informal sources of cultural knowledge for working with parents such as consulting with colleagues and simply interacting and communicating frequently, meaningfully, and informally with parents need to be acknowledged. These sources need to be analyzed to determine their strengths and limitations, in order to better support teachers in developing their practices of parent involvement.

In the next section, I will move from the presentation of the context for teachers' practices of of parent involvement to discuss the teachers' expectations for parental roles in their children's schooling. The discussion will include a general summary of the possible roles for parents as seen by the teachers, and a more detailed look at how each teacher agreed and differed in their views.

Teachers' Expectations for Parental Roles in the Learning Process

The three teachers' expectations for parents, as revealed in interviews and in their practices of parent involvement, were broad and encompassed a wide spectrum of roles. They saw parents' roles as

ranging from the more passive such as being informed about class curriculum and children's progress to the more active one of supporting teachers in the school and district political context (e. g., advocating for needed programs and resources for children). Table 2 provides an overview of the teachers' views of parental roles in the learning process.

Insert Table 2 about here

While teachers may have agreed in principle on the possible roles for parents in their classroom, their beliefs about the extent to which they could expect parents to be involved and to carry out the different roles varied. In fact, Kathy Risotto's initial response to a question about her expectations of parents was, "I expect ... not too much really. I try not to expect too much and then you get more back." In contrast to Kathy's response, Alyssa Bond answered the question with a long list of parent responsibilities that she highlighted in an introductory letter at the beginning of each school year. As the interviews and observations of parent-teacher communication unfolded during the school year, it became obvious that these two teachers were actually very similar in their expectations for the range of roles parents could fulfill in supporting their children's learning.

General Parent Involvement in Schooling and Learning. Each of the three teachers believed that parents needed to be informed about school and class procedures, about their child's progress, and about the class curriculum. However, teachers' actual expectations about

how much parents needed to be informed, and how they should get the information, varied.

In all three teachers' views, parents needed to have an understanding of class curricular goals and purposes. In two of the classrooms, parents had access to a general overview of areas of study and the teachers' goals for the students via an initial letter that was sent home early in the year. In addition, parents received monthly class newsletters highlighting special projects and activities. In the third classroom, Linda Weston focused on a desire for parents to be informed in a more in-depth manner about the science curriculum and her goals for developing the children's understanding of the scientific method. She planned a series of evening family education sessions in which she discussed the science curriculum with parents and engaged parents and children in science experiments and activities. Kathy Risotto also wanted parents to have a more in-depth understanding of the curriculum, in her case of her approach to literature study in English. She also planned a series of parent workshops in which she presented information about the elements of a story and how parents might discuss them as they were reading with children.

Equality of participation for both mothers and fathers was an implicit expectation on all three teachers' parts. Each reported mothers and fathers both or singly attending parent conferences, contacting them about homework concerns, and making special presentations to the class. Teachers were ready to collaborate with whichever parent presented themselves to follow-up on students' homework and provide reinforcement in reading, writing, and math

TABLE 2

Teachers' Views of Parental Roles in the Learning Process

General Involvement in School and Learning	Keep informed about class procedures and student progress Understand curricular goals and purposes Influence childrens' motivation to study and learn Communicates with teacher regarding health family, circumstances, children's problems Draw on family broadly for participation, i.e. fathers and mothers, siblings, relatives, friends
Involvement in the Home	Monitor and assist with homework Teach subject matter in mathematics, reading, etc.
Involvement in the Classroom and School Setting	Collaborate with teacher to develop child's academic and social behavior Provide logistical support for class activities Act as a curriculum resource in the classroom Support teachers in the school and district political context

skills. Teachers also defined the role of "parent" broadly, in some cases encouraging children to go to other relatives or neighbors for homework assistance if their parents were unavailable or unable to help. Kathy Risotto commented that she had had children's uncles and aunts participate in field trips in the place of parents who had to work. One of Linda Weston's students had an older sister attend her parent education workshop in science when parents had other commitments.

Parents' influence on children's motivation to learn and to pursue higher education was emphasized particularly by Alyssa Bond. She said she began talking to the fifth grade parents at Back-to-School Night in the fall about plans for attending college. She expected parents to begin motivating their children about college early in their school careers.

Parent Involvement in the Home. Kathy and Alyssa both had structured systems in place for sending home weekly packets of students' finished class work and homework. Parents were expected to review the work and the notes the teachers had written regarding students' accomplishments. The teachers asked parents to sign the packets to confirm that they had looked them over with their child. Parents were also expected to add notes or comments themselves or convey their comments by phone or in person. This type of structured system was not in place in Linda Weston's classroom. She did feel that parents needed to be informed about their children's work, but she considered parents' initiative in this regard to be important. She expected them to take advantage of activities already in place such as

parent conferences and parent education programs to ask questions about the children's work and how they were progressing.

Each teacher identified areas in which they felt parents could assist in accomplishing goals for learning specific subject matter and skills. For example, one of Linda Weston's goals was to involve parents in expanding children's higher level thinking skills through "thinking and communicating with their children about something, ... in this case, science." Kathy Risotto asked parents to work closely with their children as they were beginning to master long division, to give them more one-on-one attention as they were learning the complex sequence of steps. She and Alyssa Bond both sought parent assistance with helping children to memorize the multiplication facts.

Assistance with developing writing skills is an area in which Alyssa Bond requested parent cooperation on a regular basis. She was the only one of the three who indicated an expectation for such direct and extended involvement in children's homework. She said, "I tell the parents, 'Please read over all their reports or any kind of writing that they have to turn in and show them, point out the mistakes and have them fix it before I see it.'" She added however, "I don't think too many parents do, but I wish they would." And she also suggested that this is one area in which she had different expectations for the English- and Spanish-speaking parents:

> "I think that Spanish-speaking parents are not going to be able to correct the work necessarily, so I suggested that the kids have one of the teachers read it."

The one area that two of the teachers clearly saw as key for parent participation was homework. Kathy Risotto stated it succinctly,

"I expect them to follow through on their children's homework". Alyssa Bond agreed, and in fact had the children phone home if they had not turned in their homework two days in a row, so that parents were informed immediately. She elaborated her expectation of the parents' role regarding homework as follows:

> "If there's any problem with homework, I expect them to talk with their child and sit them down and have them do it in a place where there are no distractions."

Parent Involvement in the Classroom and School Setting. Teachers viewed parents as potential partners in developing students' academic and social behavior in the classroom. If particular children were having difficulties in these areas, the teacher saw parent participation and support for plans to help the student to be critical. Alyssa Bond used a system of behavior contracts in which she spelled out responsibilities for herself, the student, and the parents. She expected parents to respond to the daily notes she sent home regarding improvements in the student's behavior. In her words,

> "The parent is responsible for providing either a reward or a consequence at home. I tell them, 'It's just not going to work unless you do it.' When they do it, it works really well, and when they don't, it doesn't."

Kathy Risotto described several instances in which she sought parental support for a behavior contract and was unable to get the parents' cooperation. In each case she felt the lack of parental cooperation severely hindered her ability to make progress with the student in improving their behavior. Kathy contrasted those experiences with a more successful situation in which she had designed a contract in reading for an individual student. She sent a contract every night with a place for the parent to sign and got a note

back from the mother every morning confirming that the work had been done. There was marked improvement in the student's classwork, and Kathy attributed it to his parent's cooperation.

In all three teachers' views, parents had a responsibility to inform teachers about their children. They wanted parents to let them know about special health concerns or unusual family circumstances. If children could not get homework done for some reason, the teachers expected an explanatory note from parents. Similarly, if the child related a concern to the parent, the teachers wanted parents to relay it to them.

Parents who were willing to serve as curriculum resources were welcomed by teachers. All three teachers commented that though they talked with parents frequently about making class presentations, it did not happen often. However, Linda Weston had had one father and another mother present several art lessons to her class over a two-year period. And Alyssa Bond had a father who was a lawyer present about some aspect of the justice system, and another mother brought a friend to discuss the medical profession with the students. During a career unit, Alyssa invited parents who worked in varying types of jobs to talk with her students. She took an active approach to recruiting parents as a curriculum resource in the classroom, saying,

> "It's just if I can find out that there's something that they have to offer, I'll try to get them to offer it."

Teachers sought parent participation and logistical support for class activities such as field trips and parties, and were disappointed when parents didn't respond to their requests. Participation in these activities and attendance at planned programs such as Back-to-School

Night were used as gauges in which the overall potential for involvement of "this year's parents" was judged. Alyssa Bond had regular field trips, with three of four parents in attendance. She also had parent volunteers to help with activities such as a Thanksgiving meal she cooked with the students at school. She characterized "this year's parents" as very concerned and anxious to be kept informed about their children's class work and behavior. Not many parents attended the Back-to-School Night activity in Kathy Risotto's class, and she got no parent response to requests for participation in a field trip to a pumpkin patch. She characterized "this year's parents" as not very involved. She contrasted them with the previous year's group of parents, saying:

> "Based on what's gone on so far this year, I didn't even get one parent for the pumpkin patch and the museum field trips and the Back-to-School Night attendance was sparse. This just doesn't seem to be a group of parents who are going to be very involved or active.... Different years are different. Last year I could've started earlier with parent education stuff. Those parents were really active and involved. This year is a really different group with lots of problems."

Similarly to Kathy Risotto, Linda Weston had little or no parent participation in her field trips and parties and used it as an indication of the parents' lack of interest and willingness to participate in their children's learning in general.

In the case of parent participation in class activities, such as field trips, teachers all voiced an expectation for parents to participate actively. However, when parents did not respond, some teachers lowered their expectations and generalized that this year's parents were not willing to be involved. Alyssa Bond encouraged classroom visitations (as did Kathy Risotto), and said,

> "I always tell them if they're ever free during the day and they just want to come in, to come in, because it always has a salutary effect when a parent comes in. Or if they have free time and they want to donate their time to help out, to come in. But that's rare. Most parents are working."

In this case, the teacher clearly saw a role for parents in the classroom, but recognized that they were most often unable to visit because of work responsibilities.

Two teachers saw parents as having a viable role in supporting teachers in the political context of the school and district. Linda Weston saw Spanish-speaking parent advocacy for a program in English as a second language as instrumental in assisting teachers to get needed materials and training. Alyssa Bond sought parent support for her program in teaching Spanish as a second language and Mexican-American culture. At Back-to-School Night she encouraged parents to let the principal and school board members know of their interest in having their children learn Spanish as a second language. In fact, she considered that parent support for the program would be more effective than teacher support.

As stated at the beginning of this discussion on teachers' views of parental roles in the learning process, it is clear that teachers saw many roles for parents and had high expectations for parent involvement in schooling. In some cases they modified their expectations, for instance with Spanish-speaking parents when the assignments were in English. But in general, they expected parents to be informed, to follow up daily with homework, to collaborate in developing students' academic and social behavior, to inform the teacher about special health or other concerns, and to participate in

class activities such as homework. As stated earlier, these teacher expectations need to be looked at in the context of parent expectations and perceptions of their roles in their children's education.

Discussion and Conclusions

Research findings regarding the significance of teachers' years of experience and a sense of efficacy appear to be most relevant to the present exploration of teachers' cultural knowledge for parent involvement. The preceding discussion provides a view of the resources teachers draw on in constituting meaning in day-to-day interactions with parents. The in-depth analysis allowed by an ethnographic case study suggests that the issue is more complex than the idea that years of experience make a critical difference in teachers' practices of parent involvement and the meanings they attach to their work with parents. As the three teachers in the Huerta study reflected on their practices of parent involvement, they considered that the nature and quality of their prior experiences with parents affected their present practices and understandings of interactions with parents, not just the length of their years of experience teaching and working with parents.

In addition to the nature of their earlier interactions with parents, the teachers cited aspects of the social organization of their schools, (e.g. the presence or absence of bilingual aides and community workers and communication with prior grade teachers), as having a significant impact on their work with families. Other issues raised by the research on parent-teacher relations (e.g., concern with maintaining authority and status, differing perceptions of children's

needs, and misperceptions on the part of parents and teachers), need to be examined in the context of a study of the parents' perspectives and parent-teacher interactions in the school settings on a day-to-day basis. The analysis and interpretation of this data is beyond the scope of this paper but is discussed elsewhere (Allexsaht-Snider, 1991).

To identify what parent involvement meant in this particular social setting (one district, two schools), the perspectives of the three participating teachers must be explored triangulated with those of the parents in their respective rooms. The need to obtain the comparative perspectives is based on the following principles derived from cultural theory in general: first, culture is a group level phenomenon and is not held by individuals; second, comparison across subgroups provides a basis for developing a more general understanding of the nature of the phenomenon under study (i.e., parent involvement); and third, culture is constructed by people in interaction and not merely transmitted from one person to another. Subsequent reports on the study will examine parents' cultural knowledge for involvement in their children's schooling and their views of their roles in children's learning. Their views will be compared with teachers' views to determine patterns of commonality and difference. In addition, teachers' expectations and parents' views of their roles in the context of teachers' and parents' actual interactions in the school setting will be discussed, in order to better understand the complexity of parents' and teachers' efforts to collaborate in facilitating children's learning.

REFERENCES

(1987). The Metropolitan Life survey of the American teacher. New York: Louis Harris & Associates, Inc.

Allexsaht-Snider, M. (1991). When school goes home and families come to school: Parent-teacher interaction in a bilingual context. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of California, Santa Barbara.

Anderson-Levitt, K. (1990, November). What's French about French teachers' views of the classroom? Paper presented at the meeting of the American Anthropological Association, New Orleans, LA.

Becker, H., & Epstein, J. (1982). Parent involvement: A survey of teacher practices. The Elementary School Journal, 83(2), 85-102.

Bronfenbrenner, U. (1978). Who needs parent education? Teachers College Record, 79(4), 767-787.

Chavkin, N. (1989). Debunking the myth about minority parents. Educational Horizons, 67(3), 119-123.

Chavkin, N. F., & Williams, D. L. (1988). Critical issues in teacher training for parent involvement. Educational Horizons, 66(2), 87-89.

Clark, R. (1983). Family life and school . Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.

Clark, R. (1987). Family organization, communication styles and children's competence development. Equity and Choice, 4(1), 27-33.

Clark, R. M. (1988). Parents as providers of linguistic and social capital. Educational Horizons, 66(2), 93-95.

Cochran, M. (1987). The parental empowerment process: Building on family strengths. Equity and Choice, 4(1), 9-23.

Comer, J. (1980). School power: Implications of an intervention project . New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., Inc.

Comer, J. (1984). Home-school relationships as they affect the academic success of children. Education and Urban Society, 16, 323-337.

Comer, J. (1988). Educating poor minority children. Scientific American, 259(5), 42-48.

Corwin, R. G., & Wagenaar, T. C. (1976). Boundary interaction between service organizations and their publics: A study of parent teacher relationships. Social Forces, 55(2), 471-492.

Delgado-Gaitan, C. (1990). Literacy for empowerment: The role of parents in children's education . New York, NY: The Falmer Press.
Epstein, J. (1987). Toward a theory of family-school connections: Teacher practices and parent involvement. In K. Hurrelmann, F. Kaufmann, & F. Losel (Ed.), Social intervention: Potential and constraints (pp. 122-136). New York/Berlin: DeGruyter.

Epstein, J., & Becker, H. (1982). Teachers' reported practices of parent involvement: Problems and possibilities. The Elementary School Journal, 83(2), 103-113.

Feiman-Nemser, S., & Floden, R. (1986). The cultures of teaching. In M. C. Wittrock (Ed.), Handbook of research on teaching (pp. 505-526). New York: Macmillan.

Henderson, A. (1987). The evidence continues to grow: Parent involvement improves student achievement. Columbia, MD: National Committee for Citizens in Education.

Hoover-Dempsey, K. V., Bassler, O. C., & Brissie, J. S. (1987). Parent involvement: Contributions of teacher efficacy, school socioeconomic status and other school characteristics. American Educational Research Journal, 24(3), 417-35.

Lareau, A. (1989). Home advantage: Social class and parental intervention in elementary education. New York: The Falmer Press.

Leitch, M. L., & Tangri, S. S. (1988). Barriers to home-school collaboration. Educational Horizons, 66(2), 70-74.

Leler, S. (1983). Parent education in relation to the schools and to parents of school-aged children. In R. Haskins, & D. Adams (Ed.), Parent education and public policy (pp. 114-180). Norwood, NJ: Ablex Publishing Corporation.

Lightfoot, S. L. (1978). Worlds apart: Relationships between families and schools . New York: Basic Books, Inc.

Lortie, D. L. (1975). Schoolteacher: A sociological study . Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.

Romo, H. (1984). The Mexican origin population's differing perceptions of their children's schooling. Social Science Quarterly, 65(2), 635-649.

Trueba, H. T. (1989). Raising silent voices: Educating the linguistic minorities for the 21st century. Cambridge, MA: Newbury House Publishers.

Warren, R. (1973). The classroom as a sanctuary for teachers: Discontinuities in social control. American Anthropologist, 75, 280-291.